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## LATIN AS THE INTERNATIONAL AUXILIARY LANGUAGE<sup>1</sup>

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Man needs a means of exchanging his thoughts with his fellowman; it may be while he is a soldier in a great cause under a commander from another nation, or when he is in a conference at Paris, or at Washington, or at Genoa, or at the Hague; he may be participating in the Council of the League of Nations; he may be seeking to sell his merchandise, or to discuss matters of a professional or of a scholarly nature, or merely to exchange ideas with men of other countries and secure a better and more sympathetic understanding of their viewpoints. "Merely," did I say? Perhaps this last is the most important of all, for such understanding, more than anything else, is potent to promote peace and good will among the nations.

But the presence of many languages is the obstacle, an obstacle which can be overcome only by the concerted acceptance of some one language to be learned by all men, or by all men who learn a second language, in addition to their mother tongue. Such a language would not be intended to replace any existing national language, but would rather foster present-day languages by making converse with foreigners easy even for those who speak the less important dialects; neither would it seek to displace French in international diplomacy, nor English in international business, nor any other language now internationally used — it would seek merely to supplement, in a wider fashion, the present existing agencies of spoken and written communication, and it is therefore termed the INTERNATIONAL AUXILIARY LANGUAGE.

This problem, often discussed before, came up in definite form

<sup>1</sup> Read at the Third Annual Meeting of the American Classical League, Boston, July 3, 1922.

at the meeting of the International Research Council in Brussels in August, 1919, and several committees have since that time been wrestling with it. We cannot here go into the history of the movement; but there are evidently three possibilities, a modern language, a so-called dead language, and an artificial language. Of the modern languages, English has the best claim on the ground of widespread use in commerce and of simplicity of structure; and if natural selection were allowed to take its course, it is likely that before the end of the century English would be the accepted international language. But the jealousies of the time preclude such acceptance of English, and the world's immediate needs demand quicker results. We must look elsewhere. Among the "dead" languages Latin is obviously the choice. Of artificial languages, Esperanto is unquestionably the leading claimant, though its improved form, Ido, is decidedly better. We must, it seems, look either to Latin or to Esperanto.

What, now, are the qualifications for an International Auxiliary Language? Briefly, the sounds must be easy for most persons to make, the word roots and the forms must be easy to learn, the language must be easy to speak and easy to understand, expression and understanding must be precise and not ambiguous. Euphony and brevity, while desirable, are not essentials.

As for pronunciation, Esperanto has several sounds (English *ch*, *ts*, *j*, *sh*, French *j*, German *ch*), some of which are strange and therefore difficult to the speakers of every language of western Europe; Latin has almost no sounds offering this difficulty, except some occurring in but a few words each. Further the use in Esperanto of *c* in the Slavonic value *ts* and of *j* in the German value *y*, makes unnecessary hardships for speakers of several languages. The use by Esperanto of diacritical marks over six letters **ĉ** **ĝ** **ĥ** **ĵ** **ŝ** **ŭ** makes typesetting needlessly difficult; Latin has no such encumbrances. In accent, Esperanto, placing the accent regularly on the last syllable but one, has a certain advantage over Latin, which places it on that syllable or on the preceding one; yet the variation in Latin is largely to be formulated in a few simple rules, and the remainder might be indicated by an accent mark, as in Spanish.

The easiest vocabulary is one made up of words which appear practically unchanged in the greatest number of languages. Thus *superintendent, senate, verify, notice, state, butter*, are found in but slightly changed form in many languages. Esperanto is not made up on this principle, but on the political principle of selecting some roots from every language whose speakers are to be placated; thus it contains a considerable number of Russian, German, and Greek words which are unfamiliar except to the speakers of those languages. The reformed Esperanto, or Ido, is made up on the basis of the internationality of the roots, and it looks like a somewhat unfamiliar Romance language; for almost all the words which have spread from language to language are Latin in origin, or Greek words which pass through Latin, except *beefsteak* and *tobacco*. If, then, maximum internationality of words leads to this, why not use Latin itself, which has this international vocabulary? So on the count of ease of vocabulary Latin has the advantage over Esperanto.

In forms Esperanto is very simple; but this very simplicity contains a disadvantage, since a single sound is often so heavily charged with meaning that an undue speed in comprehension is demanded; drop an *n* in the participle, and the perfect active indicative becomes a present passive indicative; change an unaccented *a* to *i*, and the present indicative becomes the past, or to *o*, and it becomes the future. As the chief element of difficulty in understanding a foreign language is the speed, the ease of learning the forms in Esperanto is counterbalanced by an increased difficulty in understanding them aright.

Even the syntax of Esperanto has its anomalies; prepositions govern the nominative case, unless there is an idea of motion toward, when they govern the accusative. Finally, the alleged lack of idiom in Esperanto is claimed as a merit, but it is quite the reverse. Every modern language is full of idiomatic expressions. The International Auxiliary Language is, in the final analysis, intended for the use of persons who know only their mother tongues and the I. A. L.; if they know other languages, that is a fortuitous circumstance. Now in what way can such

persons eliminate the idioms from their own speech before they put it into Esperanto? And if they do not, the Esperanto is quite unintelligible in spots. I have found phrases in Esperanto which I could not understand until I had put them into German, which was evidently the language of the writer. For example, a certain phrase is in the various European languages, *before three years, it has there three years, it makes three years*; will the person who knows only English and Esperanto understand any of these, when turned into Esperanto and thence into English? True, Esperanto has a central organization which strives to give precision in such matters; but this can be done only by the creation of idioms, the avoidance of which is one of the *raisons d'être* of Esperanto. On the other hand, Latin has a perfectly fixed standard of meaning, yet it has little or none of the illogical abnormal idioms which run riot in most modern languages. We must lay stress on the certainty of understanding aright our international speech; and from this standpoint, Latin is eminently well qualified.

Latin, in fact, has never ceased to be an international language, even apart from the modern forms of it which are spoken as the national languages of France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Roumania, Central and South America, and other countries. It is the official language of the Roman Catholic Church; it is the technical vehicle of anatomy, zoology, chemistry, botany, and other sciences, botany even requiring the first publication of a newly discovered plant to be made in Latin if it is to be valid; it is the language of the prescriptions of physicians, to prevent dangerous or fatal misunderstandings; it is still the language of many books and shorter articles intended for an international public.

But shall we look forward to the Latin of Cicero as our I. A. L.? Cicero did the Latin language a real disservice by developing the complicated periodic sentence, and setting a standard of complexity for the future. We cannot seriously propose such a style; it is too difficult to speak, it is too difficult to understand. Shall we then go to the other extreme, and adopt a flexionless Latin, such as that which has been proposed by Professor Peano

and is now known as *Interlingua*? This consists essentially in the use of stems, uninflected. Let me give you a sample: *to erra es de homo* "to err is human," *omni re muta, nullo more* "all things change, nothing dies." The more I consider it, and similar schemes, the less I like it. It has defects which are not shared by Esperanto nor by Ido, and lacks the advantages of Latin. We must look rather to the late Middle and early Modern Ages, when Latin was still in vernacular use among even the reasonably educated classes and was a true international auxiliary language. There we find a Latin which differs from the classical model in having many new words which have persisted in the modern languages, and many old words in the new meanings very like those which their derivatives have in the modern languages—a Latin which in structure and in arrangement comes astonishingly near the modern languages, though it keeps essentially the forms and syntax of classical Latin, the chief syntactical variation being a substitution for indirect discourse. To such a Latin we should have to add today new words to express modern ideas; but the words are all at hand, made from Latin and Latinized Greek; *aeroplane*, *locomotive*, *automobile*, *telegraph*—replace the endings, and they are Latin words. Such Latin is easy, amazingly easy to one who sees it for the first time after being brought up on Cicero and Vergil.

As for pronunciation, we have the choice of the so-called Roman pronunciation or of a continental method. The continental methods agree in palatalizing certain consonants before certain vowels, and have but minor differences among themselves. Of them the Italian method is preferable, and it has moreover a wide currency outside of Italy as the official pronunciation of the Roman Catholic Church. English-speaking persons use practically the same palatalizations of consonants in speaking English, and would find little difficulty in adjusting the Roman pronunciation to the Italian. We must therefore use the Italian pronunciation. True, it is not historically the pronunciation of Caesar and Cicero, but we have seen it to be better to speak Latin of a later time, good Latin none the less;

and the Italian pronunciation has an honorable history of over one thousand years.

Now how is such Latin to be taught, and who is to teach it? To answer the second question first, in Homeric fashion, we have a great body of trained teachers of Latin, who with very brief but intensive preparation for this special task will be fitted for teaching Latin as the I. A. L. But for Esperanto a whole new set of teachers would have to be found, and, in view of the rules of tenure of position, the adoption of Esperanto would mean that most teachers of Latin would have to fit themselves to teach Esperanto—the present exponents of Esperanto would not, as they perhaps fancy, step into positions in the schools while the teachers of Latin would meekly step out. Latin would then be taught as a spoken language, not as a language merely to be read; and method books in considerable numbers have been prepared and are available. That these would have to be modified is unquestionable, if we are to use a late form of Latin with the Italian pronunciation; but the transfer from a more classical form of Latin to a late form and from the Roman to the Italian pronunciation are not features of tremendous difficulty. We should have to have schools in which these methods could be practiced, tested, and demonstrated; and once the demonstration had been made, we should have to secure the support of educational authorities, making Latin so taught the first foreign language studied in the schools, with favorable opportunity for the continuance of it throughout the school course. This would not imperil the position of other foreign languages, for the training in Latin would still be, even as it is now, an invaluable preparation for the study of other tongues. And Latin would still yield fruits in mental discipline and in the power of clear thinking and in the other by-products which now attend its study. If the United States were to take the lead in this with the coincident support of some other great nation, other countries would speedily follow, partly because of the traditional strength of Latin in their schools, partly out of self-interest, and partly from sentimental reasons (as in the Romance-speaking lands, where there is an ancestral pride in Latin.)

We believe that as an International Auxiliary Language Latin has advantages possessed by no other language; Latin is free from international prejudices, is easy to pronounce, is largely international in its vocabulary, is precise in its significance, is already extensively used in many and varying ways between persons who have no other language in common. Latin moreover gives a mental training, a power of clear thinking, an improved appreciation of our own vernacular, an understanding of grammatical categories, a solid foundation for other foreign languages, the entrance to one of the great literatures of the world. An artificial language can make but one claim to recognition, namely, that it may be used as a medium of speech between persons of different lands; this service Latin can render equally well in addition to its other functions. In early days the Latin language used one word, *hostis*, both for *stranger* and for *enemy*, and said *militiae* "at war" as a natural antithesis to *domi* "at home." Today, as the International Auxiliary Language, Latin may give to the stranger far from home the ability to share his feelings and ideas, his hopes and aspirations; and the stranger will no longer be a presumptive enemy, but a peaceful friend and welcome guest.